

Investigation information release

Date: October 2024

Fatality - worker falls into mine shaft

Incident date: 17 September 2024

Event: Fatality - worker falls into mine shaft

Location: Austar Coal Mine number 2 shaft

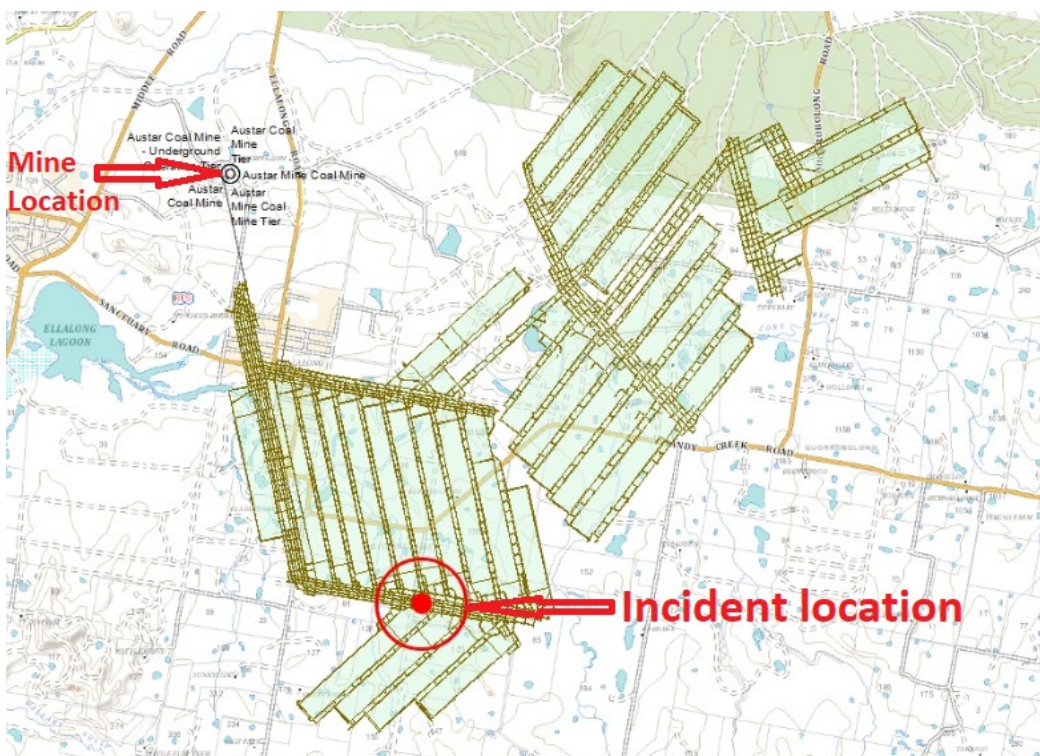
Overview

A mine worker died after he fell into a decommissioned mine shaft.

The mine

Austar Coal Mine is an underground mine operated by Yancoal Mining Services. It is in the town of Cessnock in the lower Hunter Valley, NSW. The mine ceased production in February 2020. When the incident occurred, it was in a decommissioning phase and was being prepared for closure. The incident occurred at the mine's number 2 shaft, which was at Dry Creek Road, Ellalong.

Figure 1: A map showing where the incident occurred in Ellalong, Cessnock, NSW



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The incident

Contractors were preparing to attach steel plates to beams fixed to a shaft cover about 12.30 pm on 17 September 2024. Several sections had been cut out of existing steel plates that were fixed to several beams on the shaft cover. The largest of these cuts was about one to 2 metres long and 0.5 metres wide. A contract worker fell through the area that had been cut and into the shaft.

A rescue operation commenced. The worker was found deceased about 400 metres beneath the entrance to the shaft on 18 September 2024.

Initial inquiries indicated that fall prevention and/or fall arrest equipment was not used at the time of the incident.

Figure 2: Incident scene with red arrows showing areas where the shaft was exposed when the incident occurred



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The investigation

The Resources Regulator commenced an investigation to determine the cause and circumstances of the incident that will explore the effectiveness of controls to eliminate or minimise risks to health and safety arising from fall from heights including:

- planning and coordinating the work
- communication leading up to the incident
- instruction, training, experience and supervision of the workers
- adequacy of risk assessments, work instructions and procedures.

The mine operator and other parties are assisting with the investigation. A report will be published when the investigation is concluded.

Safety information

'Mine shafts and winding systems' is a specified principal mining hazard that can cause incidents in underground mining operations, which carry a risk of serious injury or death to workers.

Mine operators and contractors are reminded of their duty to identify hazards and manage risks to health and safety in accordance with the provisions of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and *Work Health and Safety (Mines and Petroleum Sites) Act 2013* and associated Regulations.

In particular, mine operators and contractors must:

- provide adequate protection against the risk of a fall occurring and ensure that a safe system of work is implemented and maintained
- ensure that adequate information, training, instruction and supervision is provided to workers exposed to potential falls from working at height, including:
 - the proper use, wearing, storage and maintenance of personal protective equipment (PPE)
 - the hazards and risks associated with work performed at heights
 - specific guidance of how to follow health and safety procedures associated with this work, including the contents of any safe work method statements (SWMS), and
 - the reasons fall protection measures have been put in place and how they are required to be appropriately implemented for each stage of the work.

Workers are reminded of their duty to take care for their own health and safety and that of their co-workers. They must also comply, as far as they are reasonably able, with the mine's work instructions, policy and procedures to ensure worker safety and compliance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and related legislation.

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Further information

Please refer to the following guidance materials:

- [Safe Work Australia – Code of practice - Managing the risk of falls at workplaces](#)
- [Safe Work Australia – Code of practice – Demolition work](#)
- [Safe Work Australia – Fact sheet – Slips and trips](#)

About this information release

The Regulator has issued this information to draw attention to the occurrence of a serious incident in the mining industry. Further information may be published as it becomes available.

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- learn more about our work on causal investigations and emergency response
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